

Tying the Copper Wire Ant

Ed Herbst

'The sinking ant is obviously an effective pattern. A hell of a lot of fish have been taken with it, so why it remains largely overlooked by modern fly fishers is a mystery. Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch, [Terrestrials. A Modern Approach to Fishing and Tying with Synthetic and Natural Materials](#).

It was after reading Vincent C. Marinaro's comment in his book, [A Modern Dry Fly Code](#) on the red - as opposed to the black - ants that I came up with the idea of a copper wire ant:

'Consider for example, the startling fact that in two different species of the same family, the black and the red ant, there is tremendous variance, the former being absolutely opaque in the body and the latter glimmering and glowing as though lighted by some inner fire.'

Copper wire has, of course, an impeccable fly tying and fishing heritage through Frank Sawyer's famous pheasant tail nymph so to utilise it in an ant pattern was hardly a radical progression.

The other advantage of copper wire is that, once it has been wound, it is malleable.

In this design the weight of the copper wire abdomen and the small metal bead that mimics the head are going to make the hook swim upside down and so the obvious route was to design it as an upside down pattern to start with.



The author's sunken ant with wedding organza wings

I use a spool of [Semperfli 0.1 mm wire in copper](#) on a bobbin holder and start at the bend of the hook.

I favour the smallest up-eye sedge hook on the market – the Tiemco 226BL in #18.

After sliding on a 1.5 mm brass or tungsten bead, place tiny dab of superglue at the bend and start winding on the wire – the objective being to create an oval ball of wire.

To achieve this, wind progressively more wire at the midpoint of the wire ball and then whip finish and break off the excess wire. Using a pair of fine-point pliers, crimp the oval blob that has been created into a flatter profile.

This section is then covered with UV light-cured resin to create translucence.

I first coat the wire with thin Loon Fluorescing UV Fly Finish which, when cured with a UV torch, gives the pattern a blue glow in sunlight.

I then cover the copper wire with a thicker, more durable UV light-cured resin. Solarez Copper Shimmer, which contains

minute flecks of glitter dust, can provide an added trigger at this stage of the fly tying process.

If you want a darker pattern, you can cover the copper wire abdomen with superglue and sprinkle on to it the fuzz stripped from a peacock herl. This wears off eventually but the process is easily repeated.

Wing material can be twinkle organza wedding gown material or pearl micro krystal flash or plastic or CDC.



Peter Brigg's #18 Copper Wire Ant tied with plastic wings

The advantage of sinking ant patterns is that they are ideally suited to tying at the hook bend of a larger, more buoyant fly in a New Zealand rig.

CPS member Deon Stamer ties a #32 ant consisting of two balls of midge thread. He fishes it on an 8x tippet behind a buoyant dry, usually a Comparadun, and finds that, on the majority of successful drifts, the trout on the streams near Cape Town have chosen the tiny ant pattern.



Deon Stamer's very successful #32 micro-ant pattern

The copper wire ant, trundling along the bottom with its hook point up is far less likely to hang up than a conventional fly and it provides the anchor for the larger fly that bobs enticingly above it.

Copper wire, used in conjunction with UV light-cured resins such as Solarez or Loon can be used to tie small, translucent sinking ants down to #24 with little difficulty. On these small sizes I omit the legs but keep the twinkle organza wing.

The upside down sunken ant is not just attractive to trout. In my library I have a book on flies tied to drift upside down and hook point up and came across this passage: ‘We stumbled onto this killing (ant) pattern a few years ago and it adapts well to a keel hook. When bluegills won’t take a rubber spider or when the big ones are laying in wait a few feet below the surface, try this wet ant.

‘This fly is the child of necessity. From age four my daughter and her friends have loved to fish for bluegills. But these youngsters want action. No ‘contemplative man's recreation’ for them. If the second cast does not produce a fish, it is time to move on or head home. This ant pattern turned out to be the one that most consistently satisfied the kids. Adapted to the keel hook, it can be fished in the lily pads.’ Dick Pobst, [*Fish the Impossible Places – The Story of the Keel Fly*](#), 1974.

Since that book was written more than 40 years ago, all the major hook manufacturers including TMC, Hanak, Dohiku and Grip have produced jig hooks down to #20.